



Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Local Government and ABS is a quarterly newsletter created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) aimed at helping the Local Government Sector use statistics to assist with planning and other community servicing decisions.

A specific aim of this newsletter is to help you easily find information on the ABS website. It explains the structure of the ABS website and provides direct electronic links to statistical series of use to local government. Electronic links are coloured and underlined and can be activated using the mouse button. Statistical terms are also explained to help make sense of more complex data.

Local Government and ABS provides a central contact point where you can provide your views and suggestions as to how the ABS can better assist local government.

This is a free newsletter and we encourage you to forward this newsletter to others and post it on your bulletin board. Anyone is welcome to receive Local Government and ABS. To subscribe, just send an email to rex.porter@abs.gov.au with "subscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter please unsubscribe by sending an email to rex.porter@abs.gov.au with "unsubscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line.

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Change of contact officer

Rex Porter has recently assumed the role of Local Government Sector Account Manager (LGAM), and is now the contact officer for this Newsletter. If you have any comments or suggestions about this newsletter, please contact Rex by email on rex.porter@abs.gov.au, or by telephone on (08) 8237 7416.

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Recent changes to the ABS Website

From 28 August 2004, the ABS website has changed to improve the look and feel of the majority of the website. This was done to improve:

- navigation - how you get from A to B on the website and how you find information;
- search - helping you find the information you require;
- design - faster, efficient download time and greater consistency; and
- terminology - to make it easier for you to understand our information.

More detailed information about the changes is available from Recent changes to ABS website

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How to find regional data on the ABS Website

With the recent changes to the ABS Website, finding data for regions is still easy. On the right hand side of the [ABS home page](#), you will find a box headed 'Statistics by region'. You can find information for your area by name by using the [Main areas - by Name](#) link. Alternatively you can find your area from a map by either clicking on the map or using the [Main Areas - By Map](#) link.

This will lead you to National Regional Profile which is a free web based product that combines a range of ABS and non-ABS information including population, births and deaths, remoteness, unemployment, income support customer numbers, wage and salary earners, new vehicle sales and building approvals.

For further information about the Regional Statistics program, including additional regional products with state specific data series, please see the [Regional Statistics Theme Page](#). You can find the theme page by clicking on any of the choices under Themes on the left hand side of the [ABS home page](#). This will take you to the [Themes](#) page, where you can find Regional Statistics on the right hand side.

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How to find this newsletter on the ABS Website

This newsletter can be found on the ABS Website by first selecting [News and Media](#) from the main menu at the top or bottom of the screen. At the next page choose [ABS Newsletters](#). Then choose the appropriate edition under **Local Government and ABS**.

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Local government spending on environment is up

Results from the 2002-03 Local Government Environment and Natural Resources Survey (LGENRS) show that Australian local government spending on measures to protect the environment increased to \$2.6 billion during 2002-03, up 6% from 2000-01. Local government spending on natural resource management also increased to \$1.9 billion, up 9% from 2000-01.

This represents an average expenditure of \$134 per person on environment protection and \$99 per person on natural resource management activities.

The above information is just a taste of the survey findings that are available in the publication released on 25 August 2004. (Catalogue number **4611.0 Environment Expenditure, Local Government, Australia 2002-03**). [Main Features](#) are available at no charge on the ABS website.

The LGENRS was developed in response to requests by local governments, local government associations and others for national information on local government financial transactions related to managing the environment and natural resources.

In the December 2003 edition of this Newsletter, mention was made of the good response the ABS was receiving to the survey at that time. That positive response continued, with a final receival rate in excess of 95% being achieved for the survey.

The ABS is most appreciative for this high level of support and co-operation from those contributing Local Government Authorities.

For further information about the LGENRS please contact Ron Just on 03 6222 5842 or email ron.just@abs.gov.au

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What's happening in Local Government Finance

Collections

During the September quarter electronic forms for the **annual** data collection, conducted cooperatively by the ABS and the Dept of Local Government and/or Local Government Grants Commission in each state, were despatched for a number of jurisdictions. Forms for councils in the remaining jurisdictions are soon to follow. Return dates differ from state to state. In some, information is sought as early as 25 October, while for other jurisdictions information will not be required until some time into November. In every case a return earlier than the due date will greatly assist both Department of Local Government/Grants Commission and ABS to achieve their data processing schedules.

Although changes to the collection form have been kept to a minimum for the '03-'04 cycle, the ABS is mindful of the need to service evolving data needs relating to the local government sector. In some cases this can only be achieved by making changes to the collection form - usually by the introduction of new items or by requesting the classification of certain items of expenditure by a broader or perhaps different range of functions. Environmental expenditure, for instance, is an area of increasing concern and councils may well be requested to provide greater detail relating to their activities in this field in future collection cycles. At all times however the ABS will remain mindful of the necessity to balance data needs with the ability of councils to provide such information. The ABS feels that the availability of more data - particularly purpose information - will be beneficial to the sector and to local government decision makers in general.

As some would be aware, the ABS also conducts a **quarterly** survey of financial information, once again by the despatch of an electronic form to certain local government councils and corporations. The September, 2004 iteration of this survey will issue toward the end of this month with a due date of 13 October. (Although turnaround on the survey is tight the ABS has found that, with continuing improvements to councils' financial systems, the deadline is actually presenting less and less of a challenge for some.)

It is normal statistical practice to adjust the respondent sample for a particular survey from time to time. By this process some respondents will be dropped from a survey and replacements introduced. One obvious benefit of this practice is that the data provision task is not constantly borne by the same group of providers. The quarterly survey is about to undergo such a revision. Some respondents of long standing will find their input is no longer sought while certain councils will receive a quarterly survey form for the first time this September. Although respondents leaving the survey will receive a formal note of thanks in due course, the ABS takes the present opportunity to thank these providers for their valued assistance in the past. New respondents are advised that the form only seeks information relating to a reduced selection of the main financial indicators eg Rates revenue, Wages & salaries etc. As always ABS personnel will be available to assist councils in completing the form in situations where requirements are unclear.

New Developments

On 23 August, members of the ABS' Local Government Statistics Unit were represented, along with an officer of the Australian Local Government Association, at a GFS (Government Finance Statistics) conference sponsored by the ABS' Public Sector Accounts group. Discussion related to the concerns of those working in all levels of government within Australia. Some attention was also given to the issue of the introduction of international financial reporting standards and also the harmonisation of GFS with financial reporting standards. The latter issue has significance in that the annual financial return (mentioned above) is based to a large extent on GFS principles. Harmonisation of these with GAAP (generally accepted accounting principles) will conceivably make the completion of this return simpler as, post harmonisation, requirements on the form should be more easily drawn from councils' financial records.

Contacts

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Newsletter contact details

This newsletter is one way to help improve communication between the ABS and the Local Government Sector. New ABS initiatives to assist local government organisations will be announced in this newsletter as they evolve. We would like your views and suggestions about this newsletter so that it remains useful and assists you to understand and use ABS statistics. Please email comments to rex.porter@abs.gov.au, or by telephone on (08) 8237 7416.

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